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Illinois congressmen have sent an 11th-hour letter to a federal official, asking him to carefully review a proposed train-horn rule that could affect 50 communities in northern Illinois.

The Jan. 26 letter to Joshua Bolton, director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, questions the implementation cost and the data used to formulate the rule, which would guide the use of train whistles.

OMB officials are reviewing the rule, one of the last steps of the process before it goes into effect.

Federal Railroad Administration officials originally hoped the rule would become effective last December but postponed it to April 1 because they received so many comments about it, including a significant number from the Chicago area.

Under the proposal, locomotives could blow horns at crossings where they are now banned unless the crossings meet certain risk standards or upgrades are made to ensure safety.

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), who signed the Jan. 26 letter, said it was a final attempt to ensure the rule takes into consideration the circumstances that exist in northern Illinois, where whistle bans prevent trains from sounding their horns around-the-clock at hundreds of crossings in densely populated areas.

"I've got a whole set of communities that would be heavily affected by this," Kirk said. "A federal rules that requires a vast amount of noise pollution to fix a safety problem at intersections that have never had an accident seems to be inappropriate."

Although the FRA initially estimated it would cost northern Illinois communities a total of \$4 million to comply with the proposed rule, the agency has since said it could cost as much as \$26.4 million, according to the letter.

But FRA Acting Administrator Betty Monro has said the revised estimate "overstates the costs" associated with the proposed rule's requirements.

Still, the Illinois congressmen said in their letter that if the initial numbers for Illinois have been revised, OMB officials should look at other parts of the country and do a careful cost-benefit analysis.